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Elimination of racism and racial discrimination: elimination of racism and racial discrimination

Letter dated 25 October 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith the information from the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations regarding the situation with national minorities in Belarus (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 69 (a).

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**

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Annex to the letter dated 25 October 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

National minorities in the Republic of Belarus

The Republic of Belarus is a unitary multinational State. Belarusians make up the basic part of the country's population. For many centuries, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Tatars, Jews and Roma have also lived in the territory of Belarus.

Belarusians comprise 81 per cent of the 10 million persons living in Belarus. Nineteen per cent of the country's population is composed of more than 140 national groups and peoples, including Russians, 11 per cent; Poles, 3.9 per cent; Ukrainians, 2.4 per cent; and Jews, 0.3 per cent.

Since 1996, the term "minority" has not been used in Belarus with regard to citizens of different national groups. The concept of a "national community" is laid down in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. The term "national minorities" is used in the field of international relations.

There is no confrontation or conflict in Belarus on an ethnic, racial, linguistic or confessional basis. This stable situation is due to the mentality of the Belarusian people, the thousand-year history of peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence, and the long-standing and durable links between the ethnic groups living in the territory of Belarus.

National research has shown that the overwhelming majority of Belarusians do not take account of national factors in their everyday activities. More than two thirds of Belarusians have relatives from another national group. Almost 40 per cent of marriages in Belarus are contracted with representatives of other ethnic groups.

More than 20 legislative acts relating to national communities have been adopted in the Republic. The fomenting of national, racial or religious hatred is prohibited under national legislation. The commission of crimes with racist motives is recognized as an aggravating factor in terms of criminal liability.

Citizens who belong to national communities are guaranteed equal political, economic and social rights and freedoms in the Republic of Belarus. In accordance with the Constitution, the State bears the responsibility for maintaining the historical, cultural and spiritual heritage and developing the cultures of all peoples living in the country.

At the present time, 124 public organizations from 25 national communities carry out their activities in Belarus, and of that number 38 have the status of international and republican organizations. The activities of these organizations focus primarily on implementing cultural, charitable and educational programmes.

In a number of academic and educational institutions, teaching is conducted in the languages of national communities. Approximately 9,000 pupils in 188 secondary educational institutions studied the languages of national communities during the 2004-2005 academic year.

Special and elective courses have been set up in higher educational institutions for studying the history of the national minorities of Belarus, and international practice-oriented academic conferences on inter-ethnic relations have been organized.

With the assistance of the Committee on the Affairs of the Religions and National Groups of the Republic of Belarus, a number of new publications have recently been issued that are devoted to questions relating to the national communities: the compendiums *Protection of the Rights of Persons Belonging to the National Communities of the Republic of Belarus* and *Let Us Learn to Live Together*, the textbook *History and Culture of the National Communities of the Republic of Belarus*, and an information booklet entitled *Multinational Belarus*.

Actively developing international cooperation in the area of promoting the rights of persons belonging to national communities, Belarus is open to constructive dialogue and collaboration with all interested parties.